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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001289

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, EA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHDLBAUER  
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DOD/OSD A/S LONG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/01/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR UNSC MARR MOPS IS SY LE  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: WITH DAS HALE, UNSCOL SHARES CONCERNs  
ABOUT SECURITY SITUATION

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In an August 31 meeting with visiting NEA DAS David Hale, officials of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) discussed the 2009 parliamentary elections, the National Dialogue, LIBAT II, Sheba'a Farms, UNMACC's funding crisis, and the August 28 downing by Hezbollah of a Lebanese Armed Forces helicopter and killing of the pilot. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On August 31, visiting NEA DAS David Hale, accompanied by the Ambassador, DCM, and Poloffs, met with United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Chief of Staff Jack Christofides and senior advisors Diego Zorrilla and Judith Goetz at their downtown Beirut headquarters.

UNSCOL CONCERNED ABOUT  
AL-QAIDA LOCALLY

¶3. (S) Christofides stated that UNSCOL was growing and, based on advice from UN security officials, planned to move from its center city offices in the Solidere area to a villa in the suburbs. Christofides believed the most serious threat to UNSCOL was not from internal Lebanese actors but from Al Qaida groups operating in Lebanon. Out of UNSCOL's staff of eighty, fifty are associated with security, he noted. He added that UNSCOL's public image needed to improve, but he had deliberately kept a low profile with local press due to earlier distortions of UN missions and activities. He said that incoming new Special Coordinator Michael Williams is expected to arrive in October.

FOCUSED ON 2009 ELECTIONS

¶4. (C) Zorrilla stated that Williams would focus on the 2009 parliamentary elections, including monitoring election law developments in parliament, working to make electoral reforms visible, and providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Interior (MOI). Zorrilla also stressed the need to monitor closely those electoral districts expected to be

hotly contested, estimating that 40 out of 64 "Christian" seats will be contentious. The Ambassador stressed the need to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), Internal Security Force (ISF) and MOI with plans to maintain security during the lead-up to the elections and beyond.

BORDER SECURITY REQUIRES  
INCREASED LEBANESE OWNERSHIP

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¶ 15. (C) Discussion turned to the recent LIBAT II report (Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team). Zorrilla said LIBAT II offered technical recommendations for improvements but lacked "strategic direction" and "ownership" by the GOL. He added that UNSCOL can play a role, but there is presently no overriding strategy for border security, and international efforts are not coordinated. DAS Hale commented there were limits to the effectiveness of future monitoring capacity unless there is some political will coming from Syria to cooperate in border control. Zorrilla agreed with the "enormous challenge" ahead and the need for coordinated international support.

¶ 16. (C) Turning to the political and security situation, DAS Hale stated the U.S. wants to demonstrate support for "forces of moderation" and for progress on the Doha agreement and support for the LAF and ISF. Weapons smuggling to Hizballah, stated Hale, was of great concern to the Israelis. Coming from a recent stop in Israel, Hale said he was passing along his interpretation of Israeli concerns and not delivering any Israeli messages. He said Israel wanted to prevent another

BEIRUT 00001289 002 OF 002

crisis. Credible action on UNSCR 1701 was needed to convince Israel it was not "business as usual" concerning Hizballah's suspected rearming in the south.

¶ 17. (C) As for LAF support, all agreed that in the long term, the Lebanese see the army as a strong national symbol that needs greater capacity so it may play a more central role and become a stronger "alternative."

NATIONAL DIALOGUE

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¶ 18. (C) Christofides agreed that momentum on the National Dialogue appeared to have waned, with the start date now uncertain. In addition, the agenda probably will not be limited to the defense strategy, he thought. Christofides commented that a "strong president must carry through proposals," referring to the need for President Sleiman to get going on the National Dialogue. He noted that UNDP had been asked to provide technical assistance to the Presidency to support the Dialogue.

UNMACC FUNDING CRISIS

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¶ 19. (C) DAS Hale voiced his support for finding a solution for funding demining operations in south Lebanon in the wake of news that UNMACC (UN Mine Action Coordination Committee) has begun to demobilize due to insufficient funds needed to maintain the full 40-plus teams. Hale stated that he had discussed the demining issue with the Israelis during his earlier visit to Israel.

HIZBALLAH TAKES THE HEAT

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¶ 10. (C) Christofides stated he had recently visited with Hizballah officials and came to the conclusion Hizballah was keeping a low profile after the May revolt. Christofides intended to visit to discuss with Hizballah the August 28 shooting of an LAF helicopter. Hale stated the shooting was an embarrassment to the LAF. Among the theories he had heard mentioned during his stay in Beirut, he said, was that the

attack was a response to the recent selection of a new LAF commander and/or recent announcements of U.S. support to the LAF. Christofides concluded that Hizballah was not looking to "rock the boat" in the run-up to the 2009 elections and wanted to realize electoral gains. On this matter, Zorrilla commented that gains would come at March 14's expense, and Christians could gain credibility if they allied themselves more with Michel Aoun's party.

¶11. (U) DAS Hale has cleared this message.

SISON